

Six-Hours-Rule – A Dogma for Military Surgery?

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Today, the six-hours-rule is a delicate item for military logistics and it is a great challenge for medical services to provide an adequate treatment during the first hours after wounding.

Up to now “ Six-hour-rule has never been validated...” (R. Coupland, 1989)

DEFINITION

Six-hour-rule (NATO-ACE-Directive Number 85-8):

A principle of support given by the medical service. Surgical treatment should take place as soon as possible, but at last **six hours** after wounding. This principle directs the location of the first line surgical unit, which can provide **life-saving** and limb-saving surgical procedures. The unit must be reachable within 4 hours after wounding.

HISTORY

The rule is the result of traditional surgical experience. Early wound debridement and open wound treatment led to postprimary, secondary healing without infection. Sepsis and death were mostly caused by un-done, late or wrong wound treatment. The rule respects the intolerance of ischemia of traumatised tissue, especially of the skeletal muscle. In addition, the six-hours-rule considers the physiological pathway of contaminated wounds. Germs penetrate healthy tissue with 1mm per hour. Many studies show that the spreading of infection can be reduced by early infusions of potent antibiotics. In this case the virulence of most the common germs will be three to five times less.

TREATMENT STANDARDS IN CIVILIAN CASES OF POLYTRAUMA

Investigations in civilian polytrauma cases show death in 50 % during trauma, 30 % within 2 hours and 20 % caused by multi-organ-failure after 10 to 21 days. Mean rescue times of 20 to 40 minutes are usual.

Reduction of rescue time improves the chances to survive.

CONSEQUENCE

Depending on priority (P) of the injury:

P 1 –severe:

life-threatening haemorrhage, occlusion of airways

- 6-hours-rule not useful

Paper presented at the RTO HFM Symposium on “Combat Casualty Care in Ground Based Tactical Situations: Trauma Technology and Emergency Medical Procedures”, held in St. Pete Beach, USA, 16-18 August 2004, and published in RTO-MP-HFM-109.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 01 SEP 2004		2. REPORT TYPE N/A		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Six-Hours-Rule A Dogma for Military Surgery?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Military Hospital Ulm Department of Surgery Oberer Eselsberg 40 D-89075 Ulm Germany				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES See also ADM001795, Combat Casualty Care in Ground-Based Tactical Situations: Trauma Technology and Emergency Medical Procedures (Soins aux blessés au combat dans des situations tactiques : echnologies des traumatismes et procédures médicales d'urgence)., The original document contains color images.					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 6	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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P 2 - less severe-

fractures of long bones (bullet, shell), severe damage of soft tissue, thoracic/abdominal trauma without life-threat

- 6-hours-rule is restrictedly useful

P 3 -moderate-

Wounding of soft tissue, not-penetrating wounds

- 6-hours-rule is crucial, with a prolongation of the time factor by the additional use of antibiotics

P 4 -lethal-

Deleting, complex injury pattern

- 6-hours-rule is senseless

SITUATION OF THE GERMAN MEDICAL SERVICE

Adequate and best medical treatment of the victims is the political decision: immediately - professional - complete.

“.. In case of wounding all German soldiers must be provided with medical procedures which must be comparable with a result provided at home...”(GE surgeon general,1993)

By consequence, treatment according the six-hour-rule is mostly not appropriate - polytraumatised soldiers should reach clinical treatment within **”the golden hour”**.

The logistical challenge is to guarantee a modern, up-to-date medical care in field conditions.

LITERATURE

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- [6] American College of Emergency Physicians, Clinical Policy for the Initial Approach to Patients Presenting With Penetrating Extremity Trauma, Ann Emerg Med.1999;33(5): 612-36

ILLUSTRATIONS



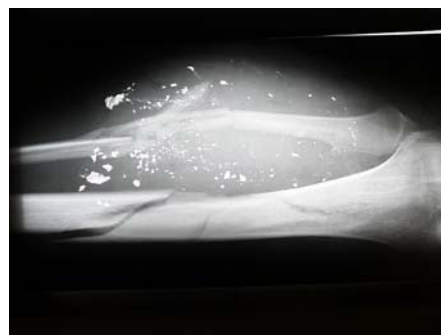
Penetrating abdominal trauma – Open surgical treatment



Penetrating lung trauma



Mine Injury



Penetrating extremity trauma

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External fixation – Mine-trauma



Wounded transported to the Kabul Field Hospital



CT-scan - Kabul Field Hospital



ICU - Kabul Field Hospital



Air transport

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Penetrating abdominal trauma
– Open surgical treatment



Penetrating lung trauma
– lung resection



Mine Injury – Open Resection



Penetrating extremity trauma
– external fixation



Mine injury, extremity trauma
– external fixation

History:

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Treatment standards in civilian cases of polytrauma:

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Consequence:

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